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A CASE OF WITCHCRAFT

THE accessible materials for a history of Elizabethan witchcraft are scattered and fragmentary. Much is lost, and much remains inedited. Yet we cannot hope to understand the prosecutions of the last sixty years of the seventeenth century, whether in Old England or in New, until we arrive at a substantially accurate comprehension of what was thought and done at the close of the great queen's reign. It is not only the dogmas of the theologians, the tenets of the physicians, and the rules of the law that we need to know, but, above everything else, the beliefs and feelings of the populace—of the folk itself. For it is in this matter of witchcraft, if anywhere, that public opinion is supreme. The populace may, perhaps, be restrained by the more enlightened part of the community, but the so-called governing classes cannot prosecute with success if the populace does not approve. Witch-hunting never flourishes unless the common people are eager for it. It is to them that the officers of the law must look for testimony, and it is the jury of the vicinage that renders the verdict. Experience has taught, over and over again, how hard it is for the most skeptical judge to bring about an acquittal in a particular case when the neighborhood from which the jury comes is convinced of the reality of the crime in general.

There was a famous witch-trial at Exeter, England, in 1682. Roger North was present, and here is his account of the state of public opinion :

The women were very old, decrepit, and impotent, and were brought to the assizes with as much noise and fury of the rabble against them as could be shewed on any occasion. The stories of their arts were in everyone's mouth, and they were not content to belie them in the country, but even in the city where they were to be tried miracles were fathered upon them, as that the judge's coach was fixed upon the castle bridge, and the like. All which the country believed, and accordingly

persecuted the wretched old creatures. A less zeal in a city or kingdom hath been the overture of defection or revolution, and if these women had been acquitted, it was thought that the country people would have committed some disorder.¹

This was a case in which it seems clear that the judges would have preferred a verdict of "not guilty" if they had been left to themselves.

Another striking example is that of Jane Wenham, who was condemned to death for witchcraft in 1712. Her trial is notable for its recent date. By that time there was much incredulity on the subject in the minds of educated men. Chief Justice Powell, who presided, made open fun of the evidence and summed up strongly in the defendant's favor, but in vain. He was obliged to sentence the woman to death and to content himself with procuring her pardon from the crown. Nor was it until 1736 that the English and Scottish statutes against witchcraft were repealed. In considering the tenacity of the popular belief on this subject, we should never forget that the essence of witchcraft is *maleficium*. The hatred and terror which a witch evokes is due to her will and her power to inflict bodily injury. Compacts with the devil, the suckling of imps, the violation of graves, the abominations of the Witches' Sabbath—these are mere incidentals, the paraphernalia of the art. They aggravate the offense, to be sure, and proof that a woman is implicated in such horrors may send her to the scaffold or the stake. But, in the last analysis, every witch is prosecuted, not because she amuses herself with riding a broomstick or because she has taken a fiend for a lover: she is hunted down like a wolf because she is an enemy to mankind. Her heart is full of malignity. For a harsh word, or the refusal of a bit of bread, she becomes your mortal foe. And her revenge is out of all proportion to the affront, for she is in league with spirits of evil who are almost infinite in strength. She sends blight upon your crops, the rot upon your sheep, the murrain on your cattle; your house takes fire; your ship is cast away. She visits you and your family with strange wasting diseases—with palsy, with consumption, with raging fever, with madness, with death. Witch-trials are not prompted by theological hair-splitting, by systems of devil-lore, by the text, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live". *These all come after the fact*. It is self-protection that incites the accuser. His cause is fear—and fear of bodily harm. The witch is a murderer, or may become a murderer on the slightest provocation. Her life cannot be spared, for there is no safety until she is sent out of the world.

¹ *Autobiography* (Jessopp, 1887), ch. X., pp. 131-132; cf. American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings*, new series, XVIII. 191 ff.

Now the mere creed—the belief that witches exist and that they can work supernaturally to the injury and even to the destruction of their enemies—is the heritage of the human race. The Englishman of the sixteenth or seventeenth century did not excogitate or dream it for himself, or borrow it from the Continent, or learn it from his spiritual advisers whether before the Reformation or after. He inherited it in an unbroken line from his primeval ancestors. And along with it came another dogma, likewise of abysmal antiquity—the theory that all diseases are of supernatural origin. This dogma had, to be sure, been somewhat limited in scope as the shaman developed into the physician, but it was still extant and still vigorous. Every malady that baffled the doctors was ascribed to witchcraft, often by the doctors themselves; and all sudden or virulent or wasting maladies lay under suspicion. These things are truisms, but they are continually lost sight of by the investigators of English witchcraft. There is a constant assumption that such beliefs are abnormal, a persistent tendency to ignore the fact that it was rather a mark of exceptional enlightenment to look to natural causes in popular diagnosis than a mark of positive credulity or superstition to look to supernatural causes. In brief, the ordinary Elizabethan, in this essential particular—the doctrine of *maleficium* and its application to disease—had not yet emerged from barbarism. And it was the doctrine of *maleficium*, and nothing else, that made the witch-creed terrible.

After a witch had been arrested, it is true, she often fell into the hands of the learned who asked her questions based on an elaborate system of demonology, and, when so interrogated, she often confessed strange things, which the industry of scholars may trace to foreign creeds or imported philosophies. Some of this erudite material, through the pulpit or otherwise, did certainly attach itself to the native and popular beliefs. And thus we may easily be led to fancy that judges, philosophers, divines—and even King James I—were to blame for the prevalence of English witchcraft in the seventeenth century. But such elaborations were merely incidental. They came into a particular case, if at all, only when the witch had once been cried out upon. Somebody falls sick, and the doctors cannot cure him; a child has hysterical fits and is grievously tormented. There are aged women in the village at whom we have long looked askance. They are foul-mouthed, perhaps, and prone to curse when we offend them; or they have laid claim to occult power, and have traded on the terror they inspire. They may even imagine themselves to hold intercourse with Satan, for they share

the current superstitions and are not very strong in their wits. One of these beldames is mentioned as the bewitcher, perhaps because the patient's distempered fancy has seen a face and called a name. Then old rumors are revived: Smith's cattle died year before last, or Jones's little son. For there is ever at hand a huge mass of such latent evidence, all connected with the primitive doctrine of *maleficium*, and only waiting for a prosecution to bring it before the courts. When the trial begins, we may hear of compacts with Satan, of flights through the air, of sordid and hideous revels at the Witches' Sabbath. But such things are mere confirmatory details. The essential point, the really efficient impulse, is always *maleficium*—injury to goods or body or life through supernatural means.

For England, the worst period of witch-prosecution is, by common consent, the seventeenth century—the century of the Lancashire witches, of Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne, of Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus*. The reign of James, we remember, covers exactly twenty-two years, from March, 1603, to March, 1625. In 1604 Parliament enacted a famous statute against witchcraft, usually called the statute of James I. The idea has been prevalent that the delusion was dying out at the close of Elizabeth's reign, and that the advent of the British Solomon gave it fresh vigor.²

My purpose is to report an extremely interesting case of alleged witchcraft which occurred in Devonshire in 1601 and 1602, just before James came to the throne. This alone would make it significant enough. But it is still further noteworthy because it exhibits the phenomena in what we may call a pure form. We have only the testimony of voluntary, and for the most part aggrieved, witnesses. There are no arguments, no confessions, no comments from the bench. There is nothing but the beliefs and experiences of the witnesses themselves, honestly detailed according to their lights. Hence the documents afford us a perfect picture of the witchcraft creed as held by the common people. And we find, as we should expect, that the sum and substance of it all was *maleficium*—injury to the property and the health of the victims, amounting even to ruin and death.

The documents have never been printed.³ They consist of eleven "examinations",⁴ taken before a Devon justice of the peace,

² For arguments against this idea see *Studies in the History of Religions presented to Crawford Howell Toy* (1912), pp. 1-65; cf. *American Historical Review*, XX. 570 (1915).

³ I have mentioned the case in the *Studies in the History of Religions*, p. 17. Apart from this mention it seems to have eluded investigators of the subject.

⁴ One of these includes the testimony of a man and his wife, so that we really have twelve witnesses.

Sir Thomas Ridgeway, in 1601 and 1602. The manuscript was acquired by the Harvard College Library, in loose sheets, in 1905.⁵ The papers are the original records, each examination being written out by a clerk and signed by the magistrate. Most of them are in duplicate, both copies bearing Ridgeway's signature, and one is in triplicate. Such examinations were regularly taken to perpetuate testimony, and were offered as evidence at the assizes. The method

⁵ It is now numbered 24241.5. The examinations are divided into sections, numbered by a clerk, and the sheets are now bound in the order thus indicated. The contents of the manuscript are as follows (no folio numbers in the original): Leaf 1a: Alyce Butler, October 2, 1601 (§§ 1, 2). Leaf 1b: blank. Leaf 2a: Johan Baddaford, October 2, 1601 (§§ 3, 4, 5 begins). Leaf 2b: Johan Baddaford concluded (§ 5 ends); William Tompson (§ 6) and Elizabeth, his wife (§ 7), October 2, 1601. Leaf 3a: Christian Webbar, October 2, 1601 (§§ 8, 9); Christofer Honywell, October 2, 1601 (§ 10). Leaf 3b: blank. Leaf 4a: Johan Davye, January 20, 1601 (*i. e.*, 1602) (§ 10 [*bis*]). Leaf 4b: blank. Leaf 5a: William Cozen, October 2, 1601 (§§ 11, 12); Suzan Tooker, October, 1601 (§§ 13, 14, 15 begins). Leaf 5b: Suzan Tooker concluded (§ 15 ends, § 16). Leaf 6a: Johan Laishe, October 2, 1601 (§ 17). Leaf 6b: blank. (The lower half of leaf 6 has been torn off and is lost. It must have contained another examination (§ 18). Johan Laishe's examination is complete.) Leaf 7a: John Denman, before Ridgeway, March 13, 1601 (*i. e.*, 1602) (§ 19). Leaf 7b: blank. Leaf 8a: John Denman, before Ridgeway, March 13, 43 Elizabeth (*i. e.*, 1602) (§ 20), duplicate of § 19. Leaf 8b: blank. Leaf 9a: John Galsworthie, April 8, 1602 (§ 33). Leaf 9b: blank. Leaf 10a: Alice Buttlar, October 2, 1601 (§ 36), duplicate of §§ 1, 2. Leaf 10b: blank. Leaf 11a: Johan Baddaford, October 2, 1601 (§ 37), duplicate of §§ 3-5. Leaf 11b: blank. Leaf 12a: William Thompson and Elizabeth, his wife, October 2, 1601 (§§ 38, 39), duplicate of §§ 6, 7. Leaf 12b: blank. Leaf 13a: Christian Webbar, October 2, 1601 (§ 41), duplicate of §§ 8, 9. Leaf 13b: blank. Leaf 14a: Johan Davye, October 2, 1601 (§ 45), duplicate of § 10 [*bis*]. Leaf 14b: blank. Leaf 15a: John Denman, before Henry Hayward, October 2, 1601 (see below) (§ 46), duplicate of § 19 and § 20; Suzan Turke, October 2, 1601 (§ 47), duplicate of §§ 13-16 (there called Suzan Tooker). Leaf 15b: blank. Leaf 16a: Christofer Honywell, October 2, 1601 (§ 48), duplicate of § 10.

Thus it appears that there are duplicates of all the examinations but three (William Cozen, Johan Laishe, and John Galsworthie), and that John Denman's testimony appears thrice. Denman appears to have been first examined before Henry Hayward, mayor of Dartmouth. This examination is found on leaf 15a (§ 46). It is headed "*Thexaminacon of John Denman of Kingsweare taken before Sr. Thomas Ridgwaie Knight the second daye of October, 1601. et Ao R Rne Eliz etc. xliijmo.*" But the words here italicized are crossed out, and another hand has interlined "*Henry Heyward Mayor of Dartmth.*" Since "*the second*" is included in the cancellation, the date is left doubtful. Ridgeway does not sign § 46, though his signature is appended to § 47 (Suzan Turke's examination), which follows on the same page. Denman was re-examined, this time before Ridgeway, on March 13, 1601 (*i. e.*, 1602), and of this examination we have two copies, both signed by Ridgeway, one on leaf 7a (§ 19), the other on leaf 8a (§ 20). There are slight variations among the three copies, and this is true of the duplicates in the case of the other witnesses.

The examinations are in two clerkly hands. One clerk wrote § 20 (Den-

may be conveniently seen in Thomas Potts's account of the Lancashire witch-trials of 1612, at which he acted as clerk of the court.⁶ Thus our Devon record contains a considerable body of material of unquestionable authenticity.

Sir Thomas Ridgeway was a man of first-rate intelligence, and is remembered as one of the Planters of Ulster. He was born about 1565. In 1600, shortly before the date of our examinations, he was appointed high sheriff of Devon and received the honor of knighthood. In 1616 he was raised to the Irish peerage by the title of Lord Ridgeway, and in 1623 he became Earl of Londonderry.

The scene of the trouble was Hardness, a village close to Dartmouth. Here lived Michael Trevisard, a fisherman, with his wife Alice and his son Peter. All were defamed for witchcraft, and suspicion against Michael and Alice was of long standing. The witnesses against them were persons of their own humble condition, belonging in Hardness or the vicinity. There is no trace of influence from the clergy or the gentry. It was the villagers themselves who appealed to the magistrate for protection. One witness speaks of a number of them as going to Tunstall, to the house of Sir Thomas Ridgeway, to make a complaint, and as meeting Alice Trevisard on the way back. Whether the accused persons were ever brought to trial we do not know, but it is clear that Ridgeway had these documents prepared for eventual use at the assizes.

The whole essential body of the witchcraft doctrine occurs, in a highly condensed form, in the examination of Alice Butler, of Hardness. This is in two parts, and may be quoted in full. The duplicate shows a number of variant readings, some of which I have inserted in brackets. I have modernized the spelling and regulated punctuation and capitals, and so elsewhere.

Devon Th' examination of Alice Butler of Hardness, in the County aforesaid, widow, taken before Sir Thomas Ridgeway, Knight, the second of October, 1601.

1. This examinee saith that she, sitting at a door or bench in man's examination, March 13, 1602) and § 33 (Galsworthie's examination, April 8, 1602). Another clerk wrote all the other examinations. All are dated October 2, 1601, except § 10 [*bis*] (Johan Davye, January 20, 1601 [*i. e.*, 1602]), and the two just noted (§§ 20, 33, Denman and Galsworthie). Johan Davy's duplicate (§ 45) is dated October 2, 1601, though the other copy (§ 10 [*bis*]) bears date January 20, 1601 [1602].

That several examinations are lost is shown by the torn leaf (6), on the lower half of which must have stood § 18 (missing in the numbering), and also by the fact that there are no §§ 21-32, 34-35, 40, 42-44. Some of these missing sections, however, undoubtedly contained duplicates.

⁶ *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London, 1613).

Hardness aforesaid about Christide last was twelvemonth with one Michael Trevysard of Hardness aforesaid, used these words: "I would my child were able to run as well as any of these children that run here in the street!" Then said Trevysard, "It shall never run!" "No? That's hard!" says this examinee again. "No, it shall never run", answered Trevysard, "till thou hast another," repeating the same words a dozen several times at the least with great vehemency. Whereupon this examinee, being much troubled in mind, especially upon a fear conceived by her before through the general bad report that went of him, departed from him. And the very same week the same child sickened, and consumed away, being well one day and ill another, for the space of seventeen weeks or thereabout, and then died.

2. This examinee further saith, that Peter Trevysard, son of the said Michael Trevisard, came to this examinee's house to borrow a hatchet, which Alice Beere, servant to this examinee, denied, to whom the said Michael answered [*var.* and he answered], "Shall I not have it? I will do thee a good turn ere twelvemonth be at an end." And shortly the said Alice Beere sickened, continuing one day well and another day ill, for the space of eleven weeks, and then died. In which case both the husband of this examinee and a [*var.* another] child of theirs fell sick, and so continued seventeen or eighteen weeks, and then died.

TH: RIDGWAY.

The regular fashion of commenting on such utterances as these is to cry out against the malicious folly of the accuser and to lament the hard lot of the accused. May I be permitted, for once, to abandon custom, and to express my sympathy with poor Alice Butler, who had lost her husband and two of her children by some strange wasting sickness, for which she had no name, and who could only revert to the primeval tenets of savage man in her attempt to explain so dreadful a visitation? Few utterances in any records are more artlessly pathetic.

To the student of English witchcraft the document is very valuable on account of the purity and simplicity of type which it exemplifies. *Maleficium* is the gist of the whole matter, and the process described is perfectly accordant to rule. We have the *damnum minatum* and the *malum secutum*. That is all. There are no complications whatever. There is not a trace of those foreign and learned elements that are often thought to constitute the bulk of the English witchcraft doctrine after the Reformation. There is no Black Man, no book to sign, no compact with Satan. There are no infernal revels, no fiendish lovers. In short, there is nothing that is non-essential. Alice Butler's evidence is precisely the kind of testimony that might have been offered against a witch in any land and in any stage of civilization, from the Stone Age to day-before-yesterday. It would be quite pertinent at the trial of a

witch of Ashantee or Congo or the Australian bush. It exhibits the primitive and universal creed of the whole human race, preserved without the contamination of culture or education, and surviving every religious vicissitude, to the beginning of the seventeenth century, in one of the most enlightened countries in the world. Incidentally, it was quite enough to send Michael Trevisard to the scaffold if he came to trial and the jury believed Alice's story. Finally, nobody was to blame. The responsibility lay not upon the jurists or the theologians or the neighborhood: it was the burden of the human race as a whole.

An equally distressing case was that of Joan Baddaford. Alice Trevisard, it appears, had fallen out with John Baddaford, Joan's husband, and had "said unto him that he should go to Pursever Wood and gather up his wits". The precise meaning of this railing speech escapes me, but I fancy it was equivalent to calling John a scatter-brained fool. The phrase reminds one, though perhaps whimsically, of Pandar's contemptuous "Yea, hazelwood!" in Chaucer's *Troilus*.⁷ We may also adduce, tentatively, the common saying "Your wits are gone wool-gathering". It was manifestly possible, if the sequel should warrant, to interpret Alice's jeering words as a threat that John should lose his mind. The sequel did so warrant.

Within three weeks after [Joan alleged], the said John Baddaford made a voyage to Rochelle, in the *Hope* of Dittsham, and returned home again out of his wits, and so continued by the space of two years, tearing and renting his clothes, in such sort as four or five men were hardly able to bind him and keep him in order.

In like manner, as we learn from Potts's *Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, John Bulcock and his mother Joan were indicted, in 1612,

for that they feloniously had practiced, exercised, and used their divelish and wicked arts, called witchcraft, enchantments, charms, and sorceries, in and upon the body of Jennet Deane, so as the body of the said Jennet Deane, by force of the said witchcrafts, wasted and consumed, and after she, the said Jennet, became mad.

But we must return to the testimony of Joan Baddaford.

On the occasion of the same quarrel, Joan averred, Alice Trevisard had "further threatened this examate that within seven years after she should not be worth a groat, nor have a house to dwell in, nor a coat to her back". And these threats came true, for "whereas she had at that time the fee simple of an house worth one hundreth pounds, now is she worth nothing".

⁷ V. 505; cf. III. 890; V. 1174.

Let us bear in mind that the things to which poor Joan Baddaford bore witness must have been facts. Her insane husband and her fallen fortunes were neither delusions nor superstitions. We cannot ridicule or denounce; we can only pity. If Joan was a bad logician—if she reasoned *post hoc ergo propter hoc*—so do we, every day of our lives. And as to threats, they are still admissible as evidence against an accused murderer.

The next section of Joan's examination may seem trivial, but it was significant of inveterate malice on the part of the alleged witch, and thus was clearly pertinent. Some three years before the date of this document, Joan had asked a penny of Alice Trevisard "for washing of clothes". Alice paid the debt, but added that the penny should do Joan "little good". Joan spent the coin for drink, "and when the drink came, she had no power to drink thereof, but the same night fell sick, and continued so by the space of seven weeks following". This is an excellent instance of primeval magic. It is notoriously dangerous to receive anything from a witch, whether by way of gift or of payment. Joan's inability to drink is a typical symptom. We meet with it again in the Lancashire trials of 1612, as reported by Thomas Potts. One Peter Chaddock, in testifying against Isabel Robey, deposed that at one time he

was very sore pained, and so thirsty withal, and hot within his body, that he would have given anything he had to have slaked his thirst, having drink enough in the house, and yet could not drink until the time that . . . James the Glover came to him; and this examine then said before the said Glover, "I would to God that I could drink!" whereupon the said Glover said to this examine, "Take that drink, and in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, drink it,"—whereupon this examine then took the glass of drink, and did drink it all, and afterwards mended very well.

Joan Baddaford's experiences, or some of them, convinced her that Alice Trevisard was a witch. This, indeed, was the general opinion in those parts. At all events, Joan, with several of her neighbors, went to Sir Thomas Ridgeway's house at Tunstall to lay a complaint against her. On the way back, Alice met them. A dispute ensued, as was natural, and Alice said to Joan, "Thou or thine may be burned before long be!" The taunt, we may conjecture, was in answer to some such remark as that Alice deserved to be burnt for a witch. It is easy to imagine the scene. The sharp-tongued Alice, a common railer and brawler, baited by a group of villagers, all of whom believed that they had suffered at her hands, was determined to give as good as she got, regardless of the risk that anything she said might be used against her. The encounter

was on a Monday. From that day until the next Thursday Joan Baddaford made no fire in her house, whether from fear or from poverty we cannot tell. On Thursday, however, Joan began to build a fire. She laid a few coals in her chimney—brought from a neighbor's cottage, no doubt—and turned aside to break up some wood. Her child was sitting upon the hearth. Suddenly she heard the child scream, and saw that the band about his neck was burning. Looking into his neck, she found that the flesh was "burned to the bone". Yet the child had not fallen into the fire, but was "sitting on the hearth as before". Indeed, the fire was not kindled at all, but the coals lay there just as she had put them in. These facts Joan "presently shewed to divers of the chief of Dartmouth, and sought the best remedy she could, but found neither salve nor anything else that did it any good, but within three weeks after the child consumed and died". Here again is a grim fact—superstition or no superstition—the child perished miserably, and no one could understand his disease.

The examination of William Tompson, of Dartmouth, is uncommonly lively and picturesque. William was a sailor. Some six years before he and a comrade (one William Furseman, also of Dartmouth) had chanced to meet Alice Trevisard upon the Force in that town. It was about midnight. She was dressed in a "long grayish cape down to her foot", and wore a hood which covered almost all her face, "so that they took her for some Seminary priest". They asked her what she was doing in the street at that time of night. Probably the sailors were not quite sober. At any rate, they were uncivil, and if, as William alleged, they mistook Alice for a priest, we may be sure they were rough-handed. An altercation followed—but we will let Tompson tell his own story:

She fell out with them, and they were no sooner gone from her than this examinee fell, and was in great danger of breaking his neck. Whereat the said Alice laughing, this examinee said to her, "Dost thou laugh at a shrewd turn [*i. e.*, a bad accident]?" And then he struck her with a musket rod; whereupon she threatened this examinee, saying, "Thou shalt be better thou hadst never met with me!"

Vengeance was swift. Within three weeks after the *damnum minatum*, William Tompson went to sea. His ship caught fire—none knew how—and foundered. Out of twenty-five on board, only six were saved. As for William, he was picked up by a Portuguese vessel ("by a Portingalle") and carried to Spain, where he was imprisoned for a whole year. On his return Alice Trevisard said to Elizabeth Tompson, his wife, "Is he come home on life? He hath better luck than a good man! But it is no matter. He shall

be there again within this twelve months." And the prophecy was fulfilled. In less than half a year William was captured once more, this time by the Spaniards, and he was kept in confinement for twenty-five months. "Elizabeth Tompson", adds the record, "being examined upon these last speeches of her husband's oath, affirmeth them to be true."

William Tompson's sufferings inevitably bring us thoughts of a famous passage in *Macbeth*. The temptation to linger a moment over the comparison is not to be resisted. The witch in Shakspeare had been flouted by the wife of the master of the *Tiger*. The ship has reached Aleppo in safety.

But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
And, like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do!

The horrid vagueness of these menacing words has misled many. "She threatens", runs the usual note, "in the shape of a rat, to gnaw through the hull of the *Tiger* and make her spring a leak." So one might imagine, were it not that the Weird Sister proceeds to interpret her own oracle in the plainest terms.

I will drain him dry as hay!
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid.
He shall live a man forbid.
Weary se'nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine.
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost!

Nothing can be clearer than the witch's intentions. Arrived at Aleppo, she will take the shape of a rat in order to slip on board the *Tiger* unnoticed. This, and not to use her teeth, is the object of the transformation. Then she will bewitch the craft and lay a spell upon the captain. There is no question of scuttling the ship. The witch, as she tells us herself, controls the winds. She will make them contrary, so that the *Tiger*, though destined to reach port at last, shall be tossed about in storm and distress for nine times nine weeks, until the water is all gone and the provisions are exhausted. The master shall pine away with hunger and thirst and lack of sleep, until the full measure of vengeance is exacted. Then, and not till then, shall he come home to the fat ronyon, his wife, who denied the hag a chestnut and bade her begone for a foul witch. Alice Trevisard's revenge was equally swift and terrible—a fire at sea, an open boat, and a Spanish prison. Our document is of 1601,

and *Macbeth* was written not far from 1605. The one falls just before the accession of James I., the other shortly after his accession. Surely, in view of such stories as William Tompson's, we should hesitate to affirm that the interest in witchcraft which manifested itself in England soon after James ascended the throne was due to the king's influence. Let us rather infer that his accession found the agitation already under way and of long standing. Such an inference, by the way, is amply supported by the records of the time. But let us return to the sea.

A tale of all but incomparable wildness concerning a bewitched ship is reported by one Captain Silas Taylor, writing from Harwich, in England, to Joseph Williamson, keeper of state papers. The letter is dated November 2, 1667.

They tell a strange story at Ipswich [says the captain] of one of their ships that was lost in the late storms; that another of the same town passing by them, and being well acquainted, they sent their remembrances to friends; the master, Jonathan Banticke, to his parents, one Hornegild, a passenger who had lost his ship at Scarborough Road, his love to his wife and children, and all the other seamen to their relations. When asked the reason, and whether their ship was leaky, or what they wanted, the first ship replied that they had long labored to free their maintop, where sat a couple of witches, but by all that they could do, could not remove nor get them down, and so they were lost people. The master named the two witches to the second ship's master and his company, insomuch that they are now in jail at Ipswich. The story is credibly reported by the second ship, and generally believed.⁸

Thomas Heywood repeats a story which he got from an old acquaintance ("a woman of good credit and reputation"). This lady, while at Amsterdam, awaiting passage for England, left an old woman some money, taking a brass kettle as security, "which she did, knowing it to be serviceable for her to keep a charcoal fire in at sea, to comfort her and her child". The debtor could not pay, and yet objected vigorously to having the kettle go out of the country. They parted on ill terms: "Carry it away if thou canst!" cried the hag defiantly. "Marry, and I will trie what I can doe!" replied the lady, with some spirit.

The Maister called aboard, the wind stood faire, the Sea was calme, and the weather pleasant: but they had not beene many houres at Sea, when there arose a suddene, sad, and terrible tempest, as if the winds and waters had beene at dissention, and the distempered ayre at warre with both. A mightie storme then arose, insomuch that the Maister protested, that in his life he had not seene the like, and, being in despaire of shipwracke, desired both Saylers and passengers to betake themselves to their prayers. This word came from them that laboured

⁸ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1667-1668, p. 4.

above the Hatches to those that were stowed under: their present feare made them truly apprehend the danger, and betake themselves to their devotions; when suddenly one casting up his eyes, espyed an old woman sitting on the top of the maine Mast: The Maister saw her, and all those that were above, being at the sight much amased. The rumor of this went downe, which the gentlewoman hearing (who was then sitting with her child in her Cabbin and warming it over a Charcoale fire made in the Kettle). "O God!" sayth she (remembring her former words) "then the old woman is come after me for her Kettle;" the Maister, apprehending the businesse, "Marrie and then let her have it!" saith he, and takes the Kettle, coales and all, and casts them overboard into the Sea. This was no sooner done, but the Witch dismounts her selfe from the Mast, goes aboard the Brasse Kettle, and in a moment sailes out of sight: the Ayre cleared, the Windes grew calme, the tempest ceased, and she had a faire and speedie passage into England. This tough yarn Heywood certifies he had heard confirmed by other passengers on the same voyage.⁹

The next deposition in the manuscript is that of Christian Webbar. We will pass it over for a moment, to take up the examination of Christopher Honywell, since that, like William Tompson's, has to do with the sea. Christopher's deposition is unique. He was a lad of thirteen, and seems to have been playing about the harbor with another boy, Peter Trevisard, Michael and Alice's son, when the strange thing happened which tended to show that no member of the family was free from the taint of sorcery. The document is short and I shall append it entire. It would be quite charming in its naïve wonder if it were found in less sinister company.

Th' examination of Christopher Honywell aged thirteen years or thereabout, taken as aforesaid the 2 of October, 1601.

This examine saith that about Whitsuntide last he was with Peter Trevisard, son of the said Michael Trevisard, at a place at Hardness where the fishermen use to hang their nets; where the said young Trevisard did put off his father's boat, saying, "Go thy ways to New Quay, and go between the two lighters, and I will meet thee there." And farther this examine saith that he ran with the young Trevisard to the New Quay presently after, and found the boat there between the two lighters, the said quay being distant near two flight-shoots from the place where the boat was so thrust off, as aforesaid, and not right against [*i. e.*, opposite] the same place, but on one side, the said two lighters also being so near together that there was but room enough for the boat to go in.

TH: RIDGWAY.

Enchanted boats that obey their master's will, or guide themselves without the helmsman's touch, are well known in the realm

⁹ Thomas Heywood, *Τρυακειον or, Nine Bookes of Various History concerning Women* (1624), pp. 414-415.

of faery. Here belong the *Argo* with its talking figure-head, and the ships of the Phaeacians, which knew men's minds and the way to every port; here, too, the self-moving ship in Marie's *Lai de Guigemar*. Frithiof had a ship which understood his words and obeyed them. Svend Ranild, in the Danish ballad, stood upon the shore in great need of his ship, which was anchored in the offing. He blew such a blast that his horn burst into three pieces: "'Come ye not in?' quoth Ranild."

That was Ranild's golden ship,
That heard the horn so good;
She broke asunder cables nine,
And came to where he stood.
"Be thou welcome", quoth Ranild.¹⁰

The bearing of young Christopher's testimony should not be misconceived. It was merely confirmatory of the general proposition that the Trevisards possessed uncanny powers. To insist on its frivolity and hold up our hands in horror at the criminal folly of our forefathers in sending men and women to the gallows on such grounds is *parum ad rem*. No witch was ever convicted on evidence like this, nor were such harmless feats of seamanship punishable at all under the law. There was plenty of serious evidence against the Trevisards, as we have seen. And with this caveat we may revert to the deposition of Christian Webbar, which is quite different from anything we have had before, and of very particular interest.

Christian was a widow in Hardness. She had let a tenement in the village to Michael Trevisard at a yearly rent of twenty-six shillings and eightpence. He had paid only six and eightpence, and Christian demanded the pound that was in arrears. "It shall be the worse for you!" was Alice Trevisard's response. Then followed a very curious piece of malignant sorcery. Alice cast water upon Christian's stairs. One Isabel Tozar saw it done, and warned Christian to

beware how she went up her stairs, which this examine refrained accordingly for a space, in which mean space the said Alice Trevisard herself happened to pass through some part of the said stairs. And

¹⁰ Grundtvig, *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser*, vol. I., p. 374, no. 28. Since my version is a trifle free, I subjoin the original stanza (28):

Ded ware denn for-gyldene snecke,
der hand den liud feck:
hun seigled i sønder di acker-strengie nie,
och hun thill Ranellid geck.
Wer du well-kommen! sagde Ranild.

within one hour after, the said Alice, and this exanimate also, fell grievously sick, and part of the hands, fingers, and toes of the said Alice rotted and consumed away, as yet appears by her.

The singularity of this piece of sorcery consists in the fact that the maleficent magic took effect on the witch herself when she heedlessly came under its influence. Alice fell into the pit which she had dug for another. Christian suffered too, on the principle of sympathy, but the virulence of the infection was felt chiefly by its contriver.

Joan Davye testified that her husband George had a quarrel with Michael Trevisard. Within a se'nnight thereafter Joan was sitting by the fire with a young child in her arms when the child leapt into the fire and was "very much scalded". When Trevisard heard of it, he said that he could help the child in twenty-four hours, if he wished, but that he would never do good to George Davye or any of his family. Davye seems to have been at sea at the time. At all events, the very week after, on "the same voyage" (so runs the testimony) "the said George Davye was hurt very grievously in shooting off a piece for pleasure". Joan also declared that one Henry Oldreeve had some differences with Trevisard, and that soon after Oldreeve lost twenty fat wethers in one week and "he himself languished and died".

William Cozen was another person who had fallen out with Trevisard. In this case the vengeance, though deferred, was none the less certain. Within a quarter of a year, William's daughter-in-law was sadly afflicted. Without a blow or any visible cause "her neck shrunk down between her two shoulders, and her chin touched her breast, and so remaineth still in a very strange manner". This accusation, like some others that we have already looked at, finds its parallel in the Lancashire case of 1612. Alison Device was the granddaughter of old Elizabeth Demdike, who had been a devotee of sorcery for fifty years and is described as "a general agent for the devil in those parts". Alison bore witness against both her mother and her grandmother; but she herself was implicated, confessed, and was hanged. Her offense was the laming of Abraham Law, a peddler. Abraham excited the compassion of the court by his miserable plight. Before his encounter with Alison Device, he

was a verie able sufficient stout man of Bodie, and a goodly man of Stature. But by this Devilish art of Witch-craft his head is drawne awrie, his Eyes and face deformed, his speech not well to bee understood; his Thighes and Legges starcke lame; his Armes lame especially

the left side, his handes lame and turned out of their course, his Bodie able to indure no travell: and thus remaineth at this present time.¹¹

Alison was asked if she could cure the poor creature, and, though repentant, insisted that this was beyond her power. As in the case of Christian Webbar's infected stairs, the spells acted dynamically, when once they were set in motion, and passed quite beyond the witch's control. "The gods themselves cannot recall their gifts."

William Cozen's deposition closes with a bit of graphic horror which defies commentary in its simple impressiveness: "Further this examine saith that Joan Cozen, wife of this examine, being in her deathbed, requested this examine that if Alice Trevisard, wife of the foresaid Michael Trevisard, did come to her grave, he should beat her away."

The evidence of Susan Tooker (or Turke) is very definite. It involves all three Trevisards, Michael and Alice and Peter their son. About four years ago, she declared, Alice Trevisard threatened her in plain terms: "I will not leave thee worth a gray groat!" Walter Tooker, Susan's husband, was just starting on a voyage. He lost both ship and goods, though the weather was fair. Further, it appears that young Peter Trevisard had been refused drink by Susan, whereupon he said "that it had been better to have delivered him drink". Next day Susan sickened, and she suffered for seven weeks. Finally, averred Susan, Mr. Martin, in the year of his mayoralty, set up a fold, or pound, at Hardness, to keep timber in. Michael Trevisard said: "Martin, hast thou made a fold? Wind and weather shall tear up all!" And so it happened, nor could Mr. Martin keep his fold in place. "Since that time it hath been set up in the millpool, where no stormy weather can annoy it. Yet sithence it hath been plucked up very strangely, for it riseth up altogether, being timber of an exceeding great weight and bigness."

The trivial nature of some of the charges brought against alleged witches and wizards often excites the contemptuous mirth of the modern. But there is no sense or reason in such an attitude of mind. The importance of a piece of evidence should not be measured by the actual importance of the occurrence testified to, but by its significance with regard to the point at issue, that is, with regard to the question whether the defendant was or was not a practiser of "arts inhibited and out of warrant". Nobody scoffs at a prosecuting attorney now-a-days for spending his energies over scraps of paper or thumb-prints or scratched hands when a murder trial is in progress. It is just as absurd to jeer at our ancestors for

¹¹ Potts, *Wonderfull Discoverie of Witchcraft*, sig. S.

troubling themselves about exploding ale-barrels or butter that would not "come". The malice of a witch, according to the general hypothesis, may show itself in small things as well as in great. Jeering is poor business anywhere, but, if we must be contemptuous, let us concentrate our energies on the doctrine itself. No true philosopher will see anything ridiculous in the testimony of Joan Laishe, except the essential absurdity of the whole underlying thesis.

Joan, it seems, had once refused Alice Trevisard a halfpenny-worth of ale, and Alice had retorted in the customary fashion. "That shall be a hard halfpennyworth!" and "I will not leave you worth a groat!" Two days after, one of Joan's ale-casks "on the sudden leapt up of itself", and fell on the ground. The cask burst, and all the ale was lost.

Among the secondary causes of witch prosecution, the "healer", or white witch, regularly plays a conspicuous rôle. When consulted in sickness, she is quick to ascribe the ailment to evil arts, and is often ready enough to name the culprit. There need be no malice in this rôle of the white witch. She is simply in the same primitive stage of medical science which ascribes every malady to the personal enmity of a sorcerer. As to designating the guilty party, that is of course requisite. We must know who our enemy is if we are to resist or forestall his assaults.

I have said that our Devon documents include all or most of the typical features of an English witchcraft case. Accordingly, the wise woman is not lacking. Her name was Blachford, Mother Blachford of Bridgetown. Alice Trevisard, it appears, called at John Denman's house in Kingswear, alleging that she had a letter for his wife. Mistress Denman was not at home. Alice showed a piece of paper to Denman's daughter, but the girl would not touch it, because she had heard that Alice was a witch. Soon after one of Denman's children fell sick. Mother Blachford, to whom he resorted for medicine, told him that Alice Trevisard had bewitched the child. "When you go home", said Mother Blachford, "you shall find that Alice was at your house this morning with what she said was a letter." Denman inquired accordingly, and learned what had happened in his absence. There is some vagueness at this point, which cross-questioning might have dissipated. It is obvious, however, that the paper was suspected to be a charm. At all events, Denman declared that he never heard of the letter again. What became of the child is not stated. Probably it recovered, in spite of Alice's spell and Mother Blachford's remedy.

Oddly enough, I find among my notes a fragment of New Eng-

land tradition attaching to a Massachusetts witch named Blatchford. I obtained it, about thirty years ago, from a lady of eighty-four, who had heard the story from "old Mr. David Loring's wife", the victim of the spell. It is a small matter, but has not only the coincidence of name to excuse one for telling it, but also a certain relation of locality. Barnstable, where the thing happened, is named after the Devonshire Barnstaple. It was settled in 1639, and the spelling with *b* instead of *p* was a common method of writing the name of the Devonian town in the seventeenth century and is still a common local pronunciation. Some of the pioneers of the Old Colony town were Devon men. The Indian trail from Barnstable Harbor straight across Cape Cod is now a public highway, known as Mary Dunn's Road, from an Indian woman who once lived in a hut near a pond which the trail passes. The pond, too, is called after Mary Dunn. It is a pretty little sheet of water, lying quite solitary in the midst of the woods. One day, as Mrs. Loring reported, she was returning on horseback to Barnstable from the village of Hyannis, at the southern end of the trail, and, when she was nearing the pond, one Lizzie Blatchford, a witch, who lived on the margin, bewitched her horse, so that he insisted on going round and round the pond for a long time. To all intents and purposes, as we see, old Mrs. Loring was "pixey-led", and we have in her little anecdote a good instance of the connection between the fairies and witchcraft. Her remedy, if she had only known it, was to turn her cloak inside out and so reverse the spell. Bishop Corbet, best known to literature as the author of *The Fairies' Farewell*, had a similar adventure not far from 1620, and has left us a humorous account of it in his *Iter Boreale*. Corbet, not yet a bishop, was lost with his companions in Charley Forest, on the way from Newark to Bosworth.

Whilst in this mill wee labour and turne round
 As in a conjurers circle, William found
 A menes for our deliverance: "Turne your cloakes",
 Quoth hee, "for Puck is busy in these oakes:
 If ever yee at Bosworth will be found,
 Then turne your cloakes, for this is Fayry-ground!"
 But, ere this witchcraft was perform'd, wee mett
 A very man, who had no cloven feete;
 Though William, still of little faith, doth doubt
 'Tis Robin, or some sprite that walkes about.
 "Strike him!" quoth hee, "and it will turne to ayre;
 Crosse your selves thrice and strike it!" "Strike that dare,"
 Thought I, "for sure this massy forrester
 In stroakes will prove the better conjurer."

There is one more deposition in our manuscript—that of John Galsworthie of Hardness. It affords no novelties, but may be given in full to complete the record.

The examination of John Galsworthie of Hardness in the County aforesaid, husbandman, taken before Sir Thomas Ridgway, Knight, the eighth of April, 1602.

This examine sayeth that about four years sithence, his wife demanded certain money of Alice Trevisard, the wife of Michael Trevisard of Hardness, which she owed her; whereunto the said Alice Trevisard answered, "I pray God that thou never prosper in body nor goods!" And never sithence did he, this examine, or his wife, prosper in body or goods; for in very short time after that the said Alice Trevisard had spoken those words, he was taken lame in all his body and went by two crutches twelvemonth after. And further this examine saith that his wife was never well in her body, sithence, but consumed away, and died at Christmas last past. And also this examine sayeth that he had a sow great with pigs, which pigs rotted in the sow's belly within six weeks after his wife had demanded the money of the foresaid Trevisard, as aforesaid.

TH: RIDGWAY.

These documents are interesting enough as pictures of life and manners. But, as already suggested, their chief claim to our notice rests upon their date and upon the pure and unmixed form in which they exhibit the essential element in all witchcraft. The latter point needs no emphasis. The outcry against Michael Trevisard and his family was raised by the people itself—by the unadulterated, unsophisticated "folk", instigated only by its own primeval philosophy of *maleficium*. There were no social or political or theological complications. We have simply an upheaval from below, from the abysmal pit of savagery out of which the human race has had to struggle up. And such uncontaminated testimony, coming at this particular moment (in 1601 and 1602), is of very special consequence. If we are to comprehend the history of witchcraft in England, we must keep in mind, for this exact time, a clear idea of the intellectual condition of just that class to which Alice Butler and Joan Baddaford and William Tompson and all the other complainants belonged. Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, and King James's witchcraft act was passed in 1604. There is a more or less general impression that this act was momentous, and that the accession of James gave an extraordinary impulse to prosecution. If, as all will agree, our documents are typical of the state of popular feeling in 1601 and 1602, they offer an instant challenge to this idea. Anyhow they make short work of the notion that English witchcraft was a theological importation from the Continent.

G. L. KITTREDGE.